

News

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of Labor



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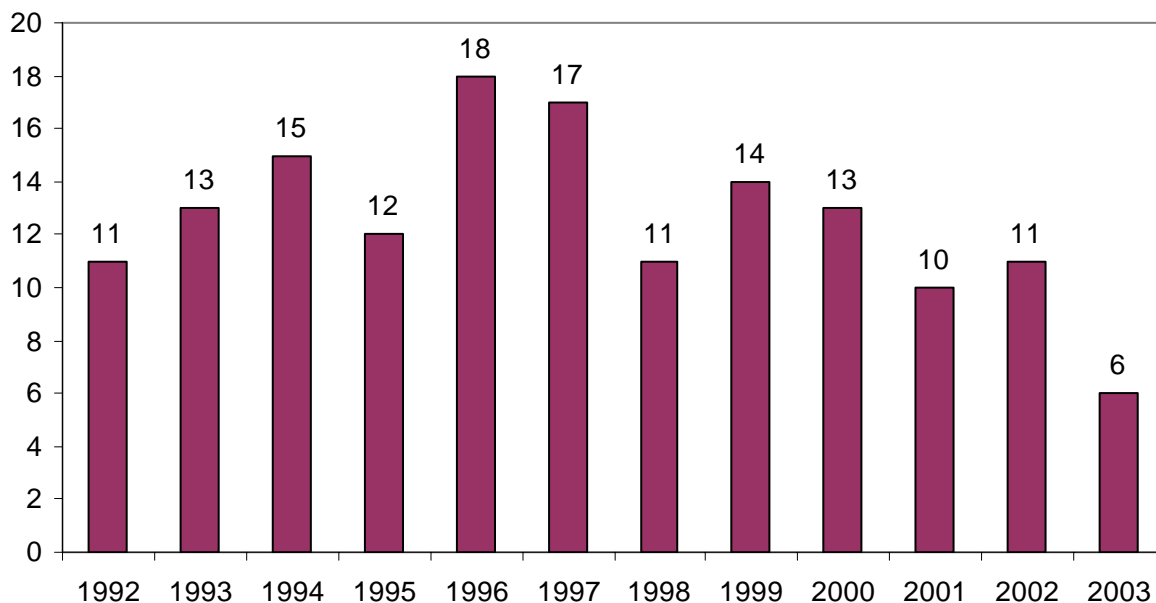
FOR RELEASE:

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DELAWARE WORKPLACE FATALITIES, 2003

Fatal work injuries totaled six in 2003 for Delaware, four of them occurring in the construction and extraction occupations, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. Regional Commissioner Sheila Watkins noted that this year's count was the lowest since the series began in 1992 and was two-thirds below the series high of 18 workplace fatalities that occurred in 1996. (See chart 1.)

Chart 1. Fatal occupational injuries in Delaware from 1992-2003



In 2003, all six of those killed on-the-job in the State were male, and four of these were white, non-Hispanic. All of those fatally injured were working for wages and salaries. Three of the six fatalities were attributable to exposure to harmful substances or environments.

During the years 1998 to 2003, fatal work injuries in Delaware totaled 65. Highway crashes were the leading cause of on-the-job fatalities over this time period, accounting for 15 deaths, or 23 percent of the total. (See table A.) Work-related deaths due to highway crashes accounted for a similar proportion nationally (24 percent) over this same six-year span. Fatal work injuries resulting from homicides (10) represented 15 percent of the State's fatality count; nationwide, homicides made up 11 percent of the total from 1998 to 2003.

Other leading causes of fatal workplace injuries in Delaware for the six-year period from 1998 to 2003 were falls to a lower level (9), struck by object (7), and pedestrian incidents (4). Fatalities resulting from falls to a lower level accounted for 14 percent of the work-related deaths in the State compared to 11 percent nationwide. Deaths resulting from being struck by an object made up 11 percent of the total for Delaware and 9 percent nationally. Pedestrian incidents accounted for 6 percent of all workplace fatalities in both Delaware and the U.S.

Table A. Fatal occupational injuries in Delaware and the United States by selected event groups, six-year total (1998-2003)

Event group	Delaware		United States ¹	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Highway crashes	15	23	8,434	24
Homicides	10	15	3,925	11
Falls to a lower level	9	14	3,853	11
Struck by object	7	11	3,265	9
Pedestrian incidents	4	6	2,235	6
Total	65	100	35,027	100

¹ Totals exclude fatalities due to the events of September 11, 2001 which claimed the lives of 2,886 persons in work status.

Additional Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries data is available on the BLS Internet site at <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshcfoi1.htm>. Data can be accessed in two ways, through Selective Access, which allows quick access to particular items, or via the special request FTP service, which allows access to an extensive collection of flat text files. The Mid-Atlantic Information Office can provide assistance accessing these files by calling (215) 597-3282.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Background of the program

The Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, part of the BLS occupational safety and health statistics program, provides a complete count of fatal work injuries available. The program uses diverse state and federal data sources to identify, verify, and profile fatal work injuries. Information about each workplace fatality (occupation and other worker characteristics, equipment being used, and circumstances of the event) is obtained by cross-referencing source documents, such as death certificates, workers' compensation records, and reports to federal and state agencies. This method assures counts are as complete and accurate as possible.

Definitions

For a fatality to be included in the census, the decedent must have been employed (that is working for pay, compensation, or profit) at the time of the event, engaged in a legal work activity, or present at the site of the incident as a requirement of his or her job. These criteria are generally broader than those used by federal and state agencies administering specific laws and regulations. (Fatalities that occur during a person's commute to or from work are excluded from the census counts.)

Data presented in this release include deaths occurring in 2003 that resulted from traumatic occupational injuries. An injury is defined as any intentional or unintentional wound or damage to the body resulting from acute exposure to energy, such as heat, electricity, or kinetic energy from a crash, or from the absence of such essentials as heat or oxygen caused by a specific event, incident, or series of events within a single workday or shift. Included are open wounds, intracranial and internal injuries, heatstroke, hypothermia, asphyxiation, acute poisonings resulting from short-term exposures limited to the worker's shift, suicides and homicides, and work injuries listed as underlying or contributory causes of death.

Information on work-related fatal illnesses is not reported in the BLS census and is excluded from the attached tables because the latency period of many occupational illnesses and the difficulty of linking illnesses to work exposures make identification of a universe problematic.

Measurement techniques and limitations

Data for the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries are compiled from various federal, state, and local administrative sources--including death certificates, workers' compensation reports and claims, reports to various regulatory agencies, medical examiner reports, and police reports--as well as news and other non-governmental reports. Diverse sources are used because studies have shown that no single source captures all job-related fatalities. Source documents are matched so that each fatality is counted only once. To ensure that a fatality occurred while the decedent was at work, information is verified from two or more independent source documents or from a source document and a follow-up questionnaire. Approximately 30 data elements are collected, coded, and tabulated, including information about the worker, the fatal incident, and the machinery or equipment involved.

Federal/state agency coverage

The Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries includes data for all fatal work injuries, whether the decedent was working in a job covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) or other federal or state agencies or are outside the scope of regulatory coverage. Thus, any comparison between the BLS fatality census counts and those released by other agencies should take into account the different coverage requirements and definitions being used by each agency.

Several federal and state agencies have jurisdiction over workplace safety and health. OSHA and affiliated agencies in states with approved safety programs cover the largest portion of the nation's workers. However, injuries and illnesses occurring in certain industries or activities, such as coal, metal, and nonmetal mining and highway, water, rail, and air transportation, are excluded from OSHA coverage because they are covered by other federal agencies, such as the Mine Safety and Health Administration and various agencies within the Department of Transportation.

Fatalities occurring among several other groups of workers are generally not covered by any federal or state agencies. These groups include self-employed and unpaid family workers, which accounted for about 21 percent of the nation's fatalities; laborers on small farms, accounting for about 1 percent; and state and local government employees in states without OSHA-approved safety programs, which accounted for about 4 percent. (Approximately one-half of the states have approved OSHA safety programs, which cover state and local government employees.)

Acknowledgments

BLS thanks the Delaware Department of Labor for their efforts in collecting accurate, comprehensive, and useful data on fatal work injuries. BLS also appreciates the efforts of all federal, state, local, and private sector agencies that submitted source documents used to identify fatal work injuries. Among these agencies are the Occupational Safety and Health Administration; the National Transportation Safety Board; the U.S. Coast Guard; the Mine Safety and Health Administration; the Employment Standards Administration (Federal Employees' Compensation and Longshore and Harbor Workers' divisions); the Department of Energy; state vital statistics registrars, coroners, and medical examiners; state departments of health, labor and industries, and workers' compensation agencies; state and local police departments; and state farm bureaus.